



Varnishing your Artwork

The pigment in paint is subject to fading when exposed to sunlight. This is not a good thing for your artwork in the long term. In addition, we live in a world with polluted air. This can cause a build up of grime on the surface of a painting. In the past, art was subject to coal and wood smoke as well as the effects of candle smoke. You can do something about this for your work.

The discussion below applies to oil and acrylic paintings. For watercolours or pastels, the best way to protect them is to frame them using UVA/UVB protective glass.

Varnish provides a protective coating over your paint. In the future, grime will only build up on the varnish and not your paint. The painting can be restored by simply removing the varnish layer using the appropriate solvent. The proper varnish will also protect the pigment against UVA and UVB rays from the sun. The Golden company makes a very effective varnish that has proven archival capabilities. This is their [MSA Varnish](#). Their web site gives the information for use of that product. I have found good results using a diluted mixture of equal parts varnish and solvent. I have used their solvent with good results but it can be expensive if you are coating a lot of large paintings. Instead, I use "Recordsol" which can be found in the paint department of stores such as Canadian Tire or Home Depot. The downside of Recordsol is that the fumes can irritate your eyes so use it in a well-ventilated area. I have tried generic Varsol but that left a very cloudy mixture which I did not attempt to use. I have also used generic mineral spirits but that left a glutinous mass that I immediately discarded.

I put the varnish on using a regular paint brush. I like to put on two coats with 24 hours of drying time between coats. The surface may feel a little tacky after the second coat but I usually give it 3 or 4 days to completely dry.

You can also use the [spray varnish](#) but that could give you uneven coats and the fumes are quite nasty. All varnishes enhance the colours of a painting with gloss varnish giving the most dramatic effect.

If you are coating a painting done with acrylics, Golden recommends that you apply a layer of [Gloss Soft Gel Medium](#) to the painting before applying the varnish. I use a diluted mixture of 2 parts gel and 1-part water with overnight drying.